7: Sahagún M-5 (1529-1590) 1955 NU7 Aztec NU7

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VALLEY OF MEXICO

[p. xv]

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648 splendour of the other Caciques who came out to meet us, who were the Lord of the town named Cuitlahuac,[1] and the Lord of Culuacan, both of them near relations of Montezuma.

342 And then when we entered that city of Iztapalapa, the appearance of the palaces in which they lodged us! How spacious and well built they were, of beautiful stone work and cedar wood, and the wood of other sweet scented trees, with great rooms and courts, wonderful to behold, covered with awnings of cotton cloth.

351 When we had looked well at all of this, we went to the orchard and garden, which was such a wonderful thing to see and walk in, that I was never tired of looking at the diversity of the trees, and noting the scent which each one had, and the paths full of roses and flowers, and the many fruit trees and native roses, and the pond of fresh water.

[501 503] There was another thing to observe, that great canoes were able to pass into the garden from the lake through an opening that had been made so that there was no need for their occupants to land. And all was cemented and very splendid with many kinds of stone [monuments] with pictures on them, which gave much to think about. Then the birds of many kinds and breeds which came into the pond. I say again that I stood looking at it and thought that never in the world would there be discovered other lands such as these, for at that time there was no Peru, nor any thought of it. [Of all these wonders that I then beheld] to-day all is overthrown and lost, nothing left standing.

648 Let us go on, and I will relate that the Caciques of that town and of Coyoacan[2] brought us a present of gold, worth more than two thousand dollars, and Cortés gave them hearty thanks for it, and showed them much affection, and he told them through our interpreters things concerning

[1] Coadlabaca in the text. [2] Cuyuacan in the text.

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241 Iztapalapa and Xochimilco, and at the present day a similar form of cultivation, although the gardens are no longer floating, may be seen at Xochimilco and along the banks of the Viga Canal, the water-way connecting Xochimilco with the City of Mexico.

These gardens are divided into long narrow strips with canals running between just wide enough for the passage of a dug-out canoe. The Indian cultivator poles his canoe along the narrow channels and scoops up the soft mud from the bottom to spread it over the land, and splashes the water over the growing plants with his paddle. It was probably this method of cultivation which gave [361] the mainly rectangular arrangement of the streets of the City of Mexico, the more unsymmetrical canals showing the original water ways between the mud banks, while the aggregation of chinampas may have left an irregular margin of outlying houses and gardens.

363 The very slight difference in level between the Lake of Texcoco and ● 503 the site of the City made the latter liable to frequent inundations, and this difficulty was met by the inhabitants by engineering works of considerable importance. A causeway was built passing through the island town of Tlahuac, dividing the Lake of Chalco from that of Xochimilco, and a second causeway separated the waters of Xochimilco from those of Texcoco. The City of Mexico had probably already been joined to the mainland, for purposes of communication, by the causeways of Tlacopan (Tacuba) and Tepeyac (Guadalupe), and a third and longer causeway was added by connecting the City with the barrier holding back the waters of Xochimilco; this third causeway was known as the causeway of Iztapalapa. The lakes of Zumpango and Zaltocan were also traversed by causeways, but it is not now possible to locate their position.

363 These various causeways did much to control the movement of
503 the waters of the lakes during the rainy season, but they were
731 not sufficient to prevent serious inundations, and native tradition and a picture in a Mexican codex[1] go to prove that during the reign of Motecuhzoma (Montezuma) Ilhuicamina, between the years 1440 and 1450, a very wet season caused the waters of Lake Texcoco to rise so much that the City was almost destroyed and the inhabitants had to take refuge in their canoes and piraguas. Montezuma applied for assistance and advice to his friend Netzahualcoyotl the King of Texcoco, and under his sage direction a great dyke was constructed, known as the "Albarradon of Nezhualcoyotl."

731 "This gigantic dyke started from Atzacualco on the North and
503 followed a straight line to the South as far as Ixtapalapa at the foot of the hill called la Estrella. This great work, which was sixteen kilometres[2] in length, was constructed of stone and clay

[1] "Codex Telleriano Remeusio." [2] Ten miles.

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and crowned with a strong wall of rubble masonry, and was protected on both sides by a strong stockade which broke the force of the waves.

"The dyke divided the lake into two parts, the larger to the East was known as the Lake of Texcoco, from the city situated on its shores, the lesser to the West was called the Lake of Mexico because the capital was surrounded by its waters on all sides. From this arrangement Mexico derived an aggregate of inestimable benefits. The great lake, like all lakes having no outlet for their waters, was salt, notwithstanding the volume of all the rivers which flowed into it, or in fact it owed its saltness to this very flow which carried in its current the soluble salts which the falling rain has robbed from the land. The salt water saturating the soil has little by little rendered it sterile, and in addition, the carbonate of soda and the thousand other impurities with which it is charged are hostile to animal life to such an extent that fishes could not live in it, neither to-day nor at the time of the Conquest, as was stated by the writers at that epoch, although the water was then less salt than it is at the present. As the lakes of fresh water to the south poured their surplus water into the lake of Mexico through the narrows of Culhuacan and Mexicaltzingo, those waters spread through the western lake, the Lake of Mexico, and completely filled it, separated as it was from the salt lake by the dyke of Netzahualcoyotl. In this way the basin of fresh water was converted into a fish pond and a home for all sorts of aquatic fowl. Chinampas covered its surface, separated by limpid spaces which were furrowed by swift canoes, and all the suburbs of this enchanting capital became flowery orchards."[1]

It will be noticed in the Upsala map that within the dyke men are depicted catching fish, while no fishermen are shown in the Lake of Texcoco, which was, however, then, as it is now, the home of numberless wild fowl. The great dyke was provided with numerous openings for the passage of canoes, but these openings were furnished with sluice gates which could be closed during the rainy season when the water of Texcoco rose and threatened to flood the City, and could be opened again to let out the fresh water from Mexico when the rapid evaporation during the summer months had lowered the level of Texcoco.

The fluctuations of level in the lakes of Chalco and Xochimilco were probably always less than in Lake Texcoco owing to the great number of copious springs of beautifully clear water which well up around their margins, especially on the west side, as well as in the lake of Xochimilco itself.

[1] Francisco de Garay, *El valle de Mexico, apuntes historicos sobre su hidrographia*, pp. 13 & 14.

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of poles and thatch of Indian tribes, none of whom had risen above a state of barbarism. Much no doubt was due to the natural surroundings; the white City with its numerous teocallis was embowered in trees and surrounded by the blue waters of the lake sparkling under a tropical sun, a lake that was alive with a multitude of canoes passing and repassing to the other white cities on its shores, and in every direction the horizon was closed with a splendid panorama of forest-covered hills, while to the south-east the eye always rested with delight on the beautiful slopes and snow-covered peaks of the two great volcanoes. It is an enchanting scene to-day, in spite of the shrinkage of the lakes, the smoke from factory chimneys, and the somewhat squalid surroundings of a modern city, and but little effort of imagination is needed to appreciate the charm that it must have exercised in the days of Montezuma.

The Viga Canal still survives as a water-way by which produce is brought into Mexico from the market gardens or chinampas of Lake Zochimilco, and it was only at the end of the eighteenth century that the canal which ran from the Viga Canal along the south side of the great square past the convent of San Francisco was finally filled in. For many years the roadway beside it was known as the "Calle de Canoas," and the names Puente de la Leña (Fire wood bridge), Portal de las Flores, etc., still mark the localities where the different commodities were sold on the banks of the Canal. Indeed, the course of many an old water-way can still be traced in the modern City by the names which have clung to the localities since the days of the conquest and are now attached to the streets.

The Upsala map seems to show that there was an embankment or pallisade along the east side of the City, necessary as a protection against the wash of the waves from the lake, but on the other sides the entrance of the numerous canals was probably through tree-lined chinampas and orchards, similar to the approach to Xochimilco at the present day. Gardens and groves were evidently numerous in the City itself; the Mexicans were distinguished for their love of flowers, and there is no climate where gardening is more remunerative than in these tropical highlands when water is plentiful. The flowering plants cultivated on the roofs of the houses must have added greatly to the picturesque aspect of the streets and canals.

Bernal Díaz tells us how clean the surroundings of the great temple were kept, where not a straw or a spot of dust could be seen (filth seems to have been confined to the temples themselves where the horrid rites of their religion were performed), and this cleanliness probably extended to the City itself, for it will be observed by any traveller in Mexico or Central America that the purely Indian villages of considerable size are almost always kept swept and tidy, while this is not the case in the towns and villages inhabited by the mixed race.

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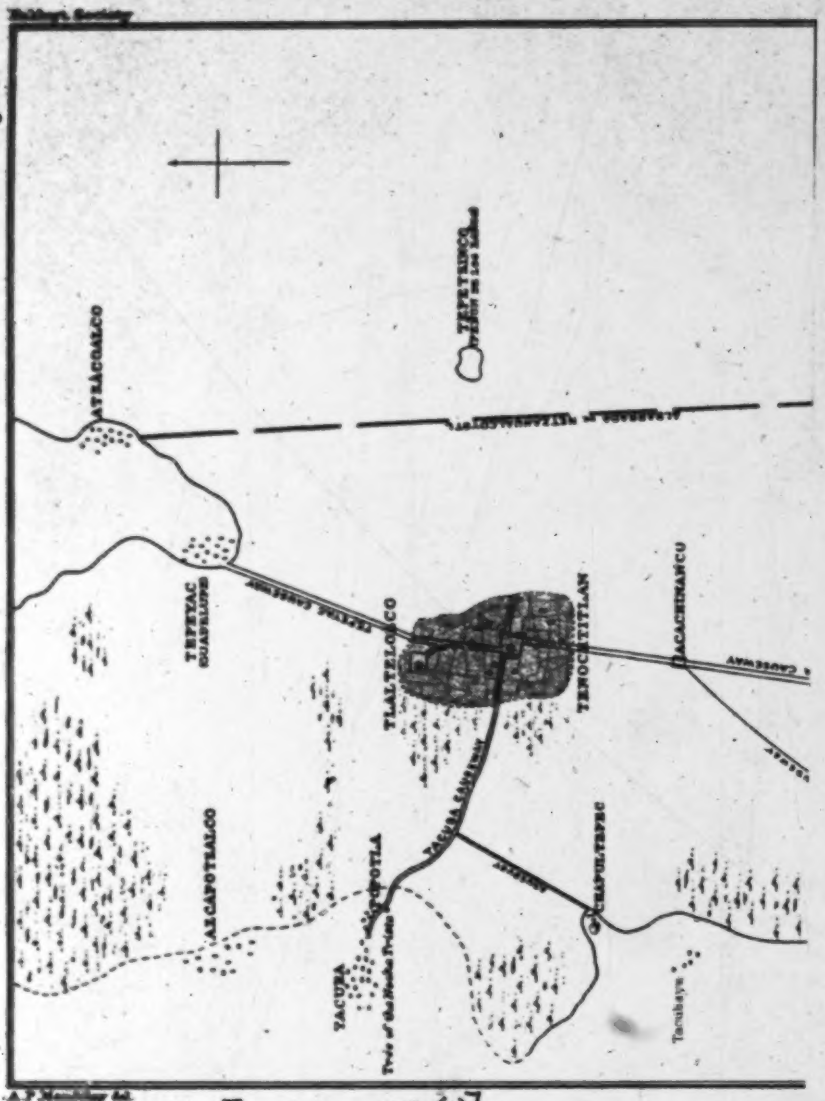

[facing p. 52 (1)]

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[Facing p. 52 (B)]